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**Plenary Session 1: Promoting policy changes for gender-sensitive disaster management and  
disaster risk reduction**

Madame Chairperson

## **What has been achieved to date?**

### ***Attention to gender equality in intergovernmental processes***

Although the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) and the 23<sup>rd</sup> Special Session of the General Assembly (2000) gave some attention to gender perspectives in natural disasters, this was only one issue among many in these outcomes. The first significant attention to gender perspectives in intergovernmental contexts was achieved when the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women – the global body with primary responsibility for gender equality and empowerment of women - decided to focus on “*Environmental management and the mitigation of natural disasters*” as one of its priority themes in 2002. The Commission adopted by consensus a set of policy recommendations (agreed conclusions) on the theme which recognized that women play a vital role in disaster reduction, response and recovery; that disaster situations aggravate vulnerable conditions and some women face particular vulnerabilities; and that women’s strengths in dealing with disasters and supporting their families and communities should be utilized to rebuild and restore their communities and mitigate against further disasters. Member States called for actions to protect and promote women’s rights, enhance their capabilities, and ensure their full participation, as well as to ensure their access to information, education and to all economic opportunities in relief and recovery projects. Efforts to fully incorporate gender perspectives in all actions, to collect sex-disaggregated data and to document good practices and lessons learned, were also called for.

At its 49<sup>th</sup> session in 2005, the Commission on the Status of Women also adopted a resolution on natural disasters, including the tsunami, which urged Governments to integrate gender perspectives into all phases of their planning for disaster preparedness and responses to natural disasters and to ensure that women play an active and equal role. Member States called for, among other things, training on the protection, rights and particular needs of women and girls and for efforts to promote gender balance and gender sensitivity among representatives and staff.

More recently, in 2008, the Commission addressed climate change as its emerging issue through an interactive expert panel. The panel noted the vulnerability of women, particularly poor women and indigenous women, to the effects of



Since then, there have been many efforts by Member States, United Nations entities, other international and regional bodies and NGOs, to advocate, raise awareness and develop capacity at global, regional and national levels for change in both policies and programmes. A workshop on “*Gender equality and disaster risk reduction*” organized in Honolulu, Hawaii in 2004, for example, promoted awareness that failure to address gender perspectives had implications for the impact and sustainability of disaster risk reduction interventions. The theme of “*Gender and disaster risk reduction*” was also included on the agenda of the 2006 International Disaster Reduction Conference in Davos, Switzerland. The Stockholm Forum for Disaster Reduction and Recovery in 2008, organized by The Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery in collaboration with the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) and UNISDR, recognized the importance of gender-responsive interventions for addressing the underlying vulnerability and poverty affecting the resilience of communities to disasters, including climate change.

Most recently, the “Manila Declaration for Global Action on Gender, Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction” from the Third Congress on Women in Politics and Governance, on Gender in Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction held in the Philippines, in October 2008, underscored that women are vital agents of change, holders of valuable knowledge and skills, and can be powerful leaders from community to global level in climate change mitigation, adaptation and in disaster risk assessment. Among other things, the Declaration called for support to Governments in developing gender-sensitive policies and programmes, allocation of adequate resources and support to women’s grassroots initiatives.

This international conference here in Beijing provides another important opportunity to further elaborate what needs to be done, and will be particularly strategic since it will feed into the second Global Forum on Disaster Risk Reduction in Geneva in June this year.

The Secretariat of UNISDR has played a key role in translating these policy commitments into action by consistently focusing attention on gender equality aspects and providing policy guidance to inform planning and programming at regional, national and local levels. For example, the Secretariat produced a guide for implementing the Hyogo Framework for Action - “*Words into action: A guide for implementing the Hyogo Framework*” in 2007-2008 which highlights that gender is a core factor in disaster risk and in the reduction of risk. It calls for the use of gender-differentiated information to ensure the effective targeting of interventions at the most vulnerable groups; the use of gender assessments; the disaggregation of data by sex and the development of gender-sensitive indicators; the involvement of both women and men; and the use of gender-balanced teams.

In 2007, the UNISDR Secretariat launched an initiative to build global partnerships for gender mainstreaming to provide a platform for sharing information, increasing the visibility of women’s roles and contributions, and providing policy guidance. UNISDR also brought gender perspectives to the attention of participants at the June 2007 Global Platform fo





- including their root causes, and encourage the application of the results of this research in policies and programmes (CSW-7e);
- Include gender analysis and methods of mapping hazards and vulnerabilities at the design stage of all relevant development programmes and projects in order to improve the effectiveness of disaster risk management, involving women and men equally (CSW-7i);
  - Ensure the implementation of their commitments by all Governments, made in Agenda 21 and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, including those in the areas of financial and technical assistance and the transfer of environmentally sound technologies to the developing countries, and ensuring that a gender perspective is mainstreamed into all such assistance and transfers (CSW-7p);
  - Strengthen the capacity of ministries, emergency authorities, practitioners and communities to apply a gender-sensitive approach to environmental management and disaster reduction and the involvement of women professionals and field workers (CSW-7s);
  - Forge constructive partnerships between Governments, international organizations and civil society, including the private sector and NGOs, and other stakeholders in integrated and gender-sensitive sustainable development initiatives to reduce environmental risks (CSW-7t);
  - Encourage civil society, including NGOs, to mainstream a gender perspective in the promotion of sustainable development initiatives, including in disaster reduction (CSW-7u);
  - Ensure coordination in the United Nations system, including the full and active participation of funds, programmes and specialized agencies to mainstream a gender perspective in sustainable development including, inter alia, environmental management and disaster reduction activities (CSW-7v).

General Assembly resolution 63/216 (2009) recognized the importance of integrating a gender perspective and empowering and engaging women in the design and implementation of all phases of disaster management, as well as in risk reduction strategies and programmes, but did not call for specific actions by Member States. It encouraged the Secretariat of the Strategy to continue to increase the promotion of gender mainstreaming and empowerment of women.

Efforts have been made by Member States (including some development cooperation agencies), United Nations entities, other international and regional organizations, and NGOs, to build on these policy commitments by advocating and providing support for gender mainstreaming. As a result, even more detailed understanding of the required action at regional, sub-regional and national and local level has been established. A lot more is now known about what needs to be done in practical terms to increase attention to gender perspectives in disaster management and risk reduction. This knowledge is, however, fragmented and not disseminated and lessons learned and good practices are not sufficiently disseminated and replicated.

Further work needs to be undertaken to bring this increased awareness of concrete actions needed into the global policy context in order to utilize the legitimacy and credibility of formally adopted recommendations and to take advantage of the potential of intergovernmental processes for regular follow-up and the convening power which provides opportunities for exchange of experiences, lessons learned and good practices. To build on the existing commitments and to develop them further, three key questions have to be raised:

- How can these global policy commitments be used more systematically and effectively to inform policy and programme development at regional, sub-regional and national and local levels?
- What are the main constraints to their full implementation at different levels and how can these be addressed?
- How can follow-up through monitoring and reporting and exchange of experience be strengthened?

UNISDR and others have clearly identified some of the major constraints to implementation of these recommended actions, including continued lack of awareness on the linkages between gender equality and disaster risk reduction, particularly at the level of practice; the related lack of information and data; and the lack of leadership, accountability, resources and capacity (including methodologies and tools for gender mainstreaming). All actors are repeatedly requested to mainstream gender perspectives at both policy and programme level, but too little clear guidance is available.

### **What more can be done to strengthen and effectively utilize global policy commitments to enhance gender mainstreaming?**

In addition to the excellent work already undertaken, in particular by UNISDR and partners, there are some additional actions that can be recommended at global level to accelerate attention to gender perspectives, with concrete outcomes. This includes promoting stronger, more explicit policy commitments and strengthening their implementation at national level through awareness-raising, information and communication and promotion of methods and tools for gender mainstreaming, as well as developing more opportunities for follow-up and exchange of experiences.

#### ***Increase policy attention***

Policy attention to gender mainstreaming in disaster management and risk reduction needs to be strengthened through elaborating what needs to be done in practical terms. Innovative ways of making the General Assembly resolutions on the ISDR more action-oriented in this respect need to be developed. One way to do this may be to establish a group of Member States' "Friends of Gender Mainstreaming in Disaster Risk Reduction" to advocate for more detailed policy attention to gender mainstreaming, including by developing appropriate text for resolutions and other intergovernmental outcomes. Member States can also request that increased attention to gender perspectives is included in all reports of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly, as a means to influence outcomes and improve monitoring and reporting on implementation.

If policy commitments were more concrete and practically-oriented, follow-up could be facilitated. Member States, and other stakeholders including United Nations entities, could be requested to report in global policy contexts more systematically on practical efforts to implement such commitments and to share experiences, lessons learned and good practices.

The existing concrete commitments on gender mainstreaming in the Hyogo Framework – to integrate gender perspectives in all policies, planning, decision-making, including on risk assessments, early warning, information and training - should be widely disseminated and guidance provided on how these can be implemented at regional, sub-regional, national and local levels.

Similarly, the Agreed Conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women on *Environmental management and the mitigation of natural disasters* could be used more systematically and effectively, since these provide the most detailed recommendations on the issue of disaster management and risk reduction. The Agreed Conclusions are available in all six languages of the United Nations and should be disseminated widely and used to advocate for change at regional and national level. Member States could also request the Commission to find ways to follow-up more systematically on the practical implementation of these agreed conclusions. The Commission on the Status recommendations could be replicated and followed up in the General Assembly context.

In the forthcoming priority theme of the Commission on the Status of Women in 2012 on *"The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges,"* efforts can be made to ensure that there is a clear focus on disaster risk reduction and climate change under the heading of "current challenges". This would allow for further



elaboration of concrete policy recommendations in relation to disaster risk reduction, to follow-up the earlier agreed conclusions on disaster mitigation.

multiple stakeholders – Member States, UN entities and NGOs, and develop new constituencies for work on mainstreaming gender perspectives in disaster risk reduction. In this way, attention can also be maintained in intergovernmental processes on achievements and gaps and challenges in relation to the implementation of the gender equality outcomes at regional, sub-regional, national and local levels..

The opportunities for advocacy and awareness-raising on disaster management and risk reduction in the forthcoming 15 year review of implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and in the ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Review on gender equality should also be fully utilized.

Advocacy and awareness-raising on gender perspectives in disaster management and risk

to provide links to their work on disaster risk reduction to strengthen gender mainstreaming in disaster risk reduction.

Further efforts could be made to engage national mechanisms for women in outreach and communication since these mechanisms have broad constituencies reaching down to grass-roots level. In addition to the traditional ministries or departments for women, national-level mechanisms today

At the same time, the mandates, position, support from management and access to decision-making processes and resources of gender focal points and other gender equality experts must be

if all attention is focused on men and if women's contributions and potential are not recognized. The inputs of external actors can unintentionally perpetuate or even exacerbate the existing differences and inequalities between women and men. Programmes which provide training, credit and other resources, and are focused on development of new skills, must be explicitly targeted to women as well as men to